

Some People Manage Practically and Others Practically Manage

Panel Members: **Warren Bidwell**, Superintendent, Congressional C.C., Bethesda, Md.
Richard Valentine, Superintendent, Merion G.C., Ardmore, Pa.
Holman Griffin, Mid-Atlantic Director, USGA Green Section

Excuse our title as a play on words, but we hope everyone gets the message. Practical golf course management is the name of the game and the alternative is simply a graduated scale reflecting degrees of failure. Practical management means making the most of what you have as well as formulating plans to get what you need.

The past 10 years have seen a remarkable improvement in golf course operations and the credit can be divided among new techniques, new materials and, not least of all, machinery. We are definitely agreed that golf course operations must continue to mechanize if we are to survive economically.

Along with the development and introduction of new methods and products must come a strong sense of need to increase our knowledge

and skill. Professionalism is more important today than ever before. Not only must we become more knowledgeable, but we must learn how to pass on the proper information and skills to employees. This is an age of specialization in which the strong mind is replacing the strong back in every field. More sophisticated products and equipment require a much higher degree of skill and intelligence in our employees than ever before and you as a golf course manager must continue to raise your level of proficiency in all areas or you will be replaced by someone who will.

Participation in professional turf organizations at all levels and attendance at turf meetings or simply exchanging ideas with your neighbor superintendents is vital to success. No man can successfully survive in today's society

When erecting fences, the work can be done most economically with the proper tools.





Spraying side hills too steep for a tractor. Where there is a will, there is a way.

unless he contributes as well as seeks help from others. Relating one's experience is one of mankind's oldest forms of teaching and still works well today.

Progressive clubs no longer regard travel and membership expenses for the purpose of attending turf meetings as an unnecessary expense, but rather as an investment which pays dividends. By the same token, the progressive golf course superintendent no longer regards the time spent at meetings as a carefree holiday, but rather as an opportunity to increase his professional knowledge. Both the man and the club benefit from this type of activity.

We have just made a strong case for attending turf meetings and the next point to follow should be that we must not only learn about new development, but we must also apply what we learn. At a recent conference we heard that there are three kinds of people: (1) those who make things happen, (2) those who observe what is happening, and (3) those who wonder what happened. A golf course superintendent had better develop the talent of making the right things happen because time, taxes and turf wait on no man and we can't

afford to always be wondering what happened.

Perhaps the difference between the practical manager and the fellow who practically manages is motivation. The professional listens to new information with the purpose of making use of it for his own future success and the other fellow may listen just as intently but for the purpose of explaining why his program was less than successful.

Through new equipment, exemplified by the mechanized bunker rake and the triplex putting green mower, the professional sees a way to do the job well and at the same time save money for the club. Brand "X" simply sees a new machine which will make the job easier and reduce the effort required of him. Very few clubs can afford an open budget type of operation and their success and even survival most often depends on doing a better job of managing men and money.

No one seems to argue that labor is the largest single item in a golf course budget—it accounts for nearly 60 to 70 percent of money spent for maintenance. This should readily tell us that if we can better utilize manpower and find ways of making it more efficient, or even

eliminate the need for some of it, we are attacking the cost of the maintenance problem at its source rather than treating the symptoms.

Comparison shopping for materials is in many respects commendable, but a 50 per cent saving in materials is not likely to do nearly so much good as a 50 per cent saving on the manhours required to apply it. Actually, you have very little control of the material costs in your budget, anyway. The price is set by the manufacturer and you either buy it or you don't, and if it is a good material that does the job, it often means certain failure if you don't buy it.

The story is different with labor. The basic problem is much more complicated than whether we need it or not; the problem is how best to utilize the manpower available. The grass has to be cut and there is no decision to be made about that when its growing, but you begin to make progress when you begin figuring ways to do the job more economically.

The seemingly simple problem of what to use to cut grass has an almost limitless number of solutions, each with its own ramifications in the cost of maintenance. Brands, models, initial cost, cost of maintenance, ease of maintenance, degree of skill required by the operator, life expectancy of the machine, and performance are only a few of the many hundreds of possible considerations.

Because it is impossible to disassociate any phase of management from economics, we will continue to talk about economics as we explore some of the other facets of practical management.

Supervision is a most important part of any management program. To put it in the words of one well-known golf course superintendent, "I get paid for what I get done, not what I do." The man who thinks he has to do most of the work himself is not a good supervisor and he is shirking the major portion of his responsibility. Delegation of authority is a key management tool and requires special skills which a good supervisor must learn.

Some clubs refuse to acknowledge the golf course superintendent as a supervisor and there are many golf course superintendents in name only which tend to perpetuate this practice. Refusing to acknowledge the need for a competent supervisor with professional knowledge is to invite frequent golf course crises which most often result in disaster.

The progressive golf clubs now recognize the necessity of a competent supervisor as well as a competent assistant. Security and continuity for the club are derived from having some depth in the supervisory staff.

Taking a more philosophic view of the assistant superintendent, this position trains him for the future, whether at your club or elsewhere. Golfers have long recognized the need for financial assistance to promising young golfers and have spent millions in this direction. Should they and we not be just as concerned with the talented youth who will be the future golf course superintendents?

There is no need to change titles or seek more prestige for the position of golf course superintendent and to become a kind of prima donna. The popular demand for perfection in

Contract lime applications over frozen ground quite often save time and money and it really makes no difference when lime is applied. The main concern is not to rut the fairways.





Hand picking of bermuda from bent greens is one control, however, Siduron can do the job more practically.

golf course turf and member pride in having outstanding conditions at all times is more responsible than any of our efforts for bringing this new era of professionalism to the business. It is sad but true that the days of the craftsman are almost gone. The apprentice who worked for a nominal salary to learn a trade disappeared with the horse and buggy. Few golf course superintendents are capable of handling the job their father or grandfather handled without seeking additional skills and knowledge. Hopefully, what remains of the past era of the craftsman is the intense pride in a job well done.

The practical superintendent no doubt spends a lot more time on paper work now than ever before. Labor unions, OSHA, EPA, federal, state and local regulations of all kinds make the task more demanding. These have little to do with growing grass *per se*, but they can't be overlooked without serious consequences.

Record-keeping is the driest subject of all, but it is an absolute necessity for a well managed golf course operation. The only substitute is a photographic memory, in which case the person having it and all the information should be enclosed in a plastic bubble or vault to protect the club's interest. We simply cannot be too conscious of minute details if we are to continually improve our abilities. To rely on memory for the prodigious amount of data which influences our present and future is ineffectual, to say the least. Very few superintendents become deeply involved in record-keeping beyond the extent of guideline activity, but without sufficient data from the past we

cannot expect to operate any type of business economically or in most cases effectively. Good records are essential for the practical manager, and the importance of keeping them should be stressed to any future superintendent for the same reasons that public high schools require a certain amount of history in the curriculum of every student.

Earlier in the program, Joseph C. Dey, Jr., spoke of preparing a golf course for tournament play. Such requirements are a true test of practicality, and the stresses associated with major tournaments are demanding upon both man and turf. Hosting a major tournament is a prized goal sought by many of the more progressive superintendents, and it has been said many times that every superintendent should have a chance to experience such an event as a part of his education.

Weak points in the course are revealed quickly during a major championship, and you can imagine the delight of a regular member completing a good round of golf under the same conditions of play just offered to some notable amateurs or professionals. Club members usually enjoy most tournaments and a successfully completed tournament can be a source of pride to both the club and the superintendent. There can also be many other tangible and intangible assets derived from hosting a major tournament.

Finally, your reputation and your future success in golf course management are largely determined by your managerial ability, so it is much better to be known for your practical management than for just practically managing.